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Travis County District Attorney Victim Policies

These policies are designed to ensure that victims of interpersonal violence and complex trauma know that reporting their abuse or harm will not mean they are retraumatized, ignored, or accused of not being credible.

To accomplish this goal, we will:

- **Prioritize Victims**

- Justice

- We will take seriously the prosecution of sexual assault and family violence cases.
 - We will honor victims by listening to their needs as they may change throughout the process.
 - We will consider outcomes beyond convictions as success based on each individual victim's concerns and desires.

- Prosecutors and Victim Counselors

- We will assign certain cases involving interpersonal violence and complex trauma to specially trained victim counselors to assist with providing support and resources for victims throughout the criminal case. For cases where no counselor is assigned and Court Team Leads determine a victim is experiencing trauma and would benefit from the assistance of a counselor, Leads may contact the Victim Counselor Manager to discuss having someone assigned.
 - Counselors will be assigned to cases on a rotation so caseloads are more equitable and each counselor has more time to dedicate to victims.
 - The DA's office will be available to victims beginning when the case is still under investigation to lower confusion during the handoff from investigators to prosecutors
 - Prosecutors will be available to meet with victims whose cases are declined for prosecution in order to be accountable to victims.
 - We will assign specially trained prosecutors to sex crimes and family violence detectives to help build stronger cases.
 - We will have a single prosecutor from when charges are indicted by our office to the end of the case so that victims are not shuffled around and so that prosecutors can develop a human connection to the case.
 - Victims will have the option to meet in-person with trauma-informed prosecutors and counselors before deciding how to proceed. These meetings will address the victim's needs for justice, communication, and autonomy.

- Communication
 - We will have a variety of communication plans victims can customize to fit their individual needs for clear, consistent communication.
 - We will provide advance notice of official proceedings or decisions so that victims have enough time to make decisions, prepare for upcoming court dates and consider how involved they want to be with their case.
- Safety
 - Our office will provide information to victims on how to apply for a Protective Order while the case is pending and will apply for a Protective Order upon conviction if the victim wants one and there is not one already in place.
 - Our office will redact address information from all discovery in cases where the victim has relocated and/or wants the address kept confidential for safety reasons. If we redact information for the victim's safety, we will notify the defense and wait for a Judge's ruling about whether we need to share the redacted information. If a Judge orders us to share redacted information, we will contact victims immediately and safety plan with them.
 - Staff will be trained to administer and understand Lethality Assessments and will offer safety planning to all victims.
 - We will work with judges, law enforcement, the County Attorney's office, and community partners to commit to a written firearms surrender protocol for family violence offenders.
 - We will include a referral for free legal representation to every victim to assist them with criminal justice advocacy and to ensure they have an advocate with whom conversations are protected and confidential.
- We will notify victims about the Crime Victims' Bill of Rights to ensure they know about and receive the support they are legally entitled to.
 - We will make sure all victims know about the possibility of Crime Victims Compensation.
 - We will ensure all victim counselors within the DA's office receive presumptive eligibility training and will help with filing and appealing compensation claims.
 - We will directly connect victims to community support including mental and behavioral health treatment, housing resources, legal assistance, and other support services.
- **Ensure Access to Justice for all Victims**
 - All staff will receive trauma-informed training including training around the dynamics of interpersonal violence, the use of expert witnesses and the neurobiology of trauma.
 - We know that people who are working class, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, or LGBTQIA+ face additional dangers from family violence and sexual assault and from interacting with the legal system. We will train our staff to minimize harm. This will include bias training on race, gender, culture, and economic status as well as anti-racism training.
 - We will embrace accessibility for all, making sure that victims, regardless of their ability, have equal access to justice.
 - Our office will create UVisa policies that protect immigrant victims of crime who have been, are, or are likely to be helpful to law enforcement or prosecution, while

recognizing the limiting impact of the dynamics of interpersonal violence on prosecution.

- **Collaborate with Community Advocates and Experts**

- Community Organizations Collaboration
 - We will rejoin the Sexual Assault Response and Resource Team (SARRT) and the Domestic Violence High Risk Team and actively collaborate in these community-based, expert-led multi-disciplinary task forces. We will partner with community-based organizations to reinstitute the practice of educating each new Grand Jury on current and validated studies on the prevalence and dynamics of sexual and intimate partner violence.
- We will create a collaborative approach to victim advocacy so that specially trained counselors within the DA's office, community organizations, and/or law enforcement agencies can be available for each victim based on their needs.
- We will collaborate with providers beyond the legal system.
 - We will use multidisciplinary coordinated community response teams to make sure we are meeting victims' needs beyond what the legal system can provide, as is currently done in jurisdictions across the nation.
 - We will use experts and advocates outside of the DA's office and law enforcement (for example forensic nurses specifically trained to recognize the signs of strangulation and sexual assault) to create stronger cases with a higher likelihood of outcomes that meet victims' needs.
- We will use the power of the DA's office to secure the funding and resources needed to build up our community organizations.

- **Transparency**

- Data
 - Our office will work with community partners to identify data that we will make available to the public.
- Policies and Procedures
 - Our office's policies and procedures for cases will be written, straightforward, and available to the public.
 - We will engage in community outreach around what actions constitute a criminal act, what resources are available for victims, and what to expect when reporting a criminal case.
- Case tracking
 - We will advocate for prompt and proper testing of rape kits for all cases.
- Oversight and Accountability
 - Community critique will be welcomed and responded to publicly.
 - We will create an Advisory Board composed of community members and survivors for oversight with the power to hold our office accountable to survivors.